

# THE NAUTONYM STORY

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This story began over a year ago on page 106 of the May 2014 issue of Word Ways when Anil challenged me to find what he called NAUTONYMS, “sounded but not spelled tautonyms like RETREAT”.

In the August 2014 issue I offered ANNAN, COCOA, CUSCUSS (v.f.) ENSENSE, ENTENTE, KICKY, LILY, NINNY, PIPPY, SISSY and TITTY\*.

On page 265 of the November 2014 issue, Anil says that his US-Australian ear hears the six examples which have an I and which end in Y, as combining “a short i with a long e sound”.

This is wrong and, in the February 2015 issue, I pointed out that these examples are phonetic tautonyms according to the phonetics of the Oxford English Dictionary. The OED phonetics makes it quite clear that, in each of the above six I-Y words, the terminal letter Y is, phonetically, a repeat of the second letter I. They are both pronounced as a short letter i (I).

In the May 2015 issue p.107, Jeff Grant sides with Anil regarding a short i with a long e sound. This is obviously an Antipodean phonic discrepancy! At first sight, you would expect a word like Jeff’s DEEDY to be a good example but, alas, the EE is pronounced as long e (i:) and the Y as a short i (I). However, Jeff’s NINE-EYE (lamprey fish) is a good example, the I and EYE both being pronounced as a long i (ai).

Returning to the beginning of the story, the word which began it all, RETREAT, is not a true example of the genre. The E is pronounced as a short i (I) and the EA as a long e (i.)

\* In the majority of cases, in words with 5 or more letters which end in a consonant followed by the letter Y, the Y is pronounced as a short letter i (I). This might appear to be a sweeping statement but I think it is true.

I hope this has clarified the situation. I would, however, like to offer the word TAUTOPHONE as a possible alternative to NAUTONYM.

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What might be considered as the complete opposite to the above genre are what I call FAKE TAUTONYMS. These words are, letter-wise, tautonyms but not homophonic tautonyms.

In each of these 7 words, which can be found in the OED, the 2 like vowels are pronounced differently:

ADAD	ANAN	DADA	MAMA	NANA	PAPA	WAWA
ə'd æd	ə'n æn	d æd ə	m ə'm a:	n æn ə	p ə'p a:	w eɪ w ə

A more familiar example is the Oxford River ISIS, with a long i (ai) and a short i (I) respectively.